DOCUMENT RESUME

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ABSTRACT

Based on Arthur Miller' play "The Crucible," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that in 17th-century New England, people were persecuted for allegedly practicing witchcraft; students of this period have looked into the allegations and offer alternatives to witchcraft to explain the people's behavior; and Arthur Miller wrote the play using the 17th-century case of witch trials (and fictionalizing it) to comment on a 20th-century phenomenon--the hunting of communists as if they were witches. The main activity of the lesson involves students rewriting a scene from the play from the perspective of today. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

Salem Witch Trials

LENGTH OF LESSON: Three class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: U.S. History

CREDIT: Lara Maupin, humanities teacher, Thomas Jefferson High School, Alexandria, Virginia.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. In 17th-century New England, people were persecuted for allegedly practicing witchcraft.

2. Students of this period have looked into the allegations and offer alternatives to witchcraft to explain the people's behavior.

3. Arthur Miller wrote the play *The Crucible,* using the 17th-century case of witch trials (and fictionalizing it) to comment on a 20th-century phenomenon—the hunting of communists as if they were witches.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Copies of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* for all students

PROCEDURE:

1. In order to bring home the emotional power of the Salem witch trials, devote time to a whole-class dramatic reading of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible.* Assign your students to the roles, giving different students an opportunity to play each character if you like. Before you begin the play and during the reading, keep emphasizing two facts to students:

- As many experts agree, Miller used the names of real 17th-century people, but he took many liberties in ascribing motivations to them. (You might refer those students who are interested to crucible, part of a Web site put together by a student of 17th-century New England; the site enumerates historical inaccuracies and discrepancies in Miller's work.)

CS 510 931

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- Miller was motivated to write *The Crucible* in the 1950s in order to criticize the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who was leading a movement to find and prosecute suspected communists as if he were carrying out a witch trial.

2. When the reading is complete, ask your students to discuss which scenes affected them most strongly and why.

3. Go on to lead a discussion on the value of literature—in this case, literature written in the 20th century about a period 300 years earlier—in trying to understand the historical period dramatized. There are no right and wrong answers to this question, but it is important for students to think about how a literary version of history can help them as well as how it might mislead them.

4. Proceed to asking students to choose any scene from Miller's work and rewrite it from the perspective of today.

5. If students are stymied by this assignment, lead a class discussion that covers the following questions:

- How would the characters be different in the modern-day United States?
- Which events would change?
- How would the dialogue differ?
- Might witchcraft—the issue for which the characters in Miller's play are being persecuted—be replaced by some other issue? Which issue? Why?

6. Students can share their alternate versions with the class and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each other's work.

ADAPTATIONS:

Adaptation for Younger Students
Provide a summary of *The Crucible*, and read only selected scenes from the play. Have students modernize only one of the scenes that you read to them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain the economic and political causes underlying the Salem witch trials.

2. Analyze the role that Reverend Parris played in the Salem witch trials.

3. Evaluate the significance of who was accused of witchcraft and who the accusers were.

4. Brainstorm and discuss more recent events that you might label as "witch hunts."

5. Debate the use of spectral evidence and Tituba's confession in the trials. What would a modern court do with such evidence?

6. Discuss how the witch trials came to an end in Salem and what their consequences were. In your view, were matters resolved fairly?

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate students' modernized scenes using the following three-point rubric:

Three points: logically updated scene; realistic and modern dialogue; no errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

Two points: logically updated scene; dialogue not realistic or modern; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

One point: scene not logically updated; dialogue not realistic or modern; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining what makes dialogue realistic and modern.

EXTENSION:

McCarthyism
The time period from 1946 to 1955, during which Senator Joseph McCarthy led a movement to find and prosecute suspected communists, is often compared to the Salem witch trials. Ask your students to find out why. Have them research McCarthyism and compare and contrast what happened during the two time periods. Students should attempt to answer the following questions: Why was there a fear of communism and communist subversion after World War II? Were these fears justified? Who did McCarthy accuse of having communist sympathies? How were the accused investigated? What happened to them? What restrictions on freedom of speech did McCarthyism lead to? How did McCarthyism end? Why were the Army-McCarthy hearings important? How is McCarthyism viewed today, and why? When students' research is complete, ask them to write a fictionalized courtroom scene from the McCarthy era in which a Salem witch is put on trial.

Witchcraft around the World
Throughout history, accusations of witchcraft have been used as an excuse for the persecution of people whose traditions, cultures, and ideas were not easily understood or accepted by society—even when those accusations were untrue. Ask each student to investigate the role of witchcraft in a time and culture of his or her choosing. What can students find out about who was accused and why? What function did witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft play in the culture? How were those thought to be witches viewed, and why? When their research is complete, students should make brief presentations to the class about what they uncovered. You can then lead the class in a discussion of the similarities among the stories that students shared.

The Crucible
Nothing brings home the emotional power of the Salem witch trials like a dramatic reading of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Assign your students to various roles and then conduct a dramatic reading in class. When the reading is complete, ask your students to discuss which scenes affected them most strongly and why. Then have each student choose a scene and rewrite it from a modern perspective. How would the characters be different in modern-day America? What events would change? What about the dialogue? Might witchcraft be replaced by some other issue? Which issue, and why? Students can then share their alternate versions and discuss each other's work.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Salem Witchcraft Trials
Karen Zeinert, Watts, 1989.
The causes,the events and the aftermath of the trials.

Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692
Bernard Rosenthal, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Witchcraft at Salem
Chadwick Hansen, Braziller, 1969.

WEB LINKS:

Welcome to Salem, Massachusetts
This site will give some information on Salem and its relative importance in the witchcraft trials that took place over 300 years ago.
http://www.star.net/salem/default.htm

Witch Hunt Hysteria
This textual site will place in perspective what happened in Salem Village in 1692.
http://www.adventure.com/library/encyclopedia/america/crucible.html

Witch Way to Salem
The influence of witches and Salem are certainly linked at this site.
http://www.taponline.com/tap/travel/roads/rs10-24.htm

Joan's Witch Directory
Joan has gathered much information about witches and witch trials. Due to the nature of the topic, some of the material on this site may not be appropriate for all classes.
http://www.ucmb.ulb.ac.be:80/~joan/witches/index.html

The Salem Witch Trials Chronology
This is a tribute to those who died in the hysteria that gripped Salem Village in 1692.
http://www.star.net/Salem/Memorial/Default.htm

VOCABULARY:
tolerance
Freedom from bigotry or prejudice.
Context:
"The settlers were looking for religious tolerance. Ironically they were intolerant of others, and their intolerance led to a Puritan witch hunt."

stereotype
An unvarying form or pattern; fixed or conventional expression, notion, character, or mental pattern; having no individuality as though cast from a mold.
Context:
"Modern day Salem uses the stereotype of a witch riding a broomstick asits emblem."

scapegoat
A person, group, or thing that bears the blame for the mistakes or crimes of others or for some misfortune due to another agency.
Context:
"When the minister could not understand the actions of the young women of Salem, he found a scapegoat."

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: United States History

Standard: Understands how political institutions and religious freedom emerged in the North American colonies.

Benchmarks: Understands characteristics of religious development in colonial America.

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: Language Arts

Standard: Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

Benchmarks: Discovery Channel School note: Relates to Arthur Miller's The Crucible.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
The newly settled Puritan town of Salem, Massachusetts, exploded in 1692 with accusations of witchcraft and deviltry. Before the fear and hysteria ebbed, dozens of women had been tried and executed as witches. But did witches really exist, or were the trials an expression of the powerful fears and uncertainties of life in a new land?

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⊙

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
Rediscovering America: Salem Witch Trials

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. Name the two family factions that were at odds with each other in Salem Village?

2. Who were the first three residents of Salem accused of witchcraft?

3. What is spectral evidence?

4. Why will Judge Sewell be remembered?

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Rediscovering America: Salem Witch Trials

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Name the two family factions that were at odds with each other in Salem Village?
The Thomas Putnam family resisted and resented change. The Israel Porter family had business and financial ties to Salem Town.

2. Who were the first three residents of Salem accused of witchcraft?
Tituba, Sarah Goode, and Sarah Osborne.

3. What is spectral evidence?
The afflicted children believed that they saw the invisible shapes (specters) of the witches who were torturing them. No one but the children saw these apparitions. In effect, the children became the accusers, judges, and jury.

4. Why will Judge Sewell be remembered?
Judge Sewell desired to take full blame for the trials and the executions of those who were condemned as witches.

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